

## Hardware by creeper1

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**Summary:** 15 years after El was taken by the US Government, Mike Wheeler finds himself battling a cyborg sent to kill him. Hunted by deadly mercenaries, Mike must fight to survive a deadly conspiracy with the world at stake.

# 1. Chapter 1

## Chapter 1

*September 27, 1986*

The Party was sitting by Hopper's lake the day the world ended. It was a peaceful end of summer type of day where it wasn't too hot and the leaves were not ready to fall yet. Max Mayfield was shooting cans with her own wrist rocket while Lucas was gently instructing her. Dustin was repairing his radio after a mishap with Will and a slingshot lesson. Will had an art book and was drawing nature, and his best friend and step sister. El was sitting down with her boyfriend, Mike. The two were snuggled together, Mike writing in his notebook campaign ideas while El read over his shoulder.

Mike looked over his shoulder and smiled at his girlfriend reading over his shoulder. He quickly kissed her cheek. She smiled and began stroking his hair. The pair looked out to their friends and smiled. The past few years had been a challenge with the threat of the Upside Down finally ending. Now they just had to worry about teenage hormones and homework.

"Hey, Mike, if you and El can stop being disgustingly adorable, you think your going to have that campaign ready by next week?" Dustin called while putting knobs in place. "Yea, it should be ready. Just fine tuning a few things" Mike said. "And I'm helping!" El said excitedly.

"Make out sessions are not help." Max said with a laugh. She fired her rock at the can but it diverted away, Max looked over to see El wiping her nose. "Oh you bitch." Max said as El gave her a shit eating grin.

Dustin kept messing with the knobs in his radio. A signal came in.

"We found the subject, preparing for extract." A voice came in over the radio.

Everyone stared at the radio as the voice came in, they all turned over to Mike. "We need to get to get to Hop." Mike said. They

gathered their things and bolted away from the shore.

The group ran, then split off in multiple directions. Will and Dustin went one way, Lucas and Max another. Mike and El made a beeline for the cabin. They could hear people coming from behind trees. El used her powers and flung them out of their way.

Mike held onto El's hand as they saw the cabin in sight. They rushed forward to the cabin. They had prepared for this, Mike and El had a couple of backpacks with supplies so they could go on the run if the government returned. El used her powers and unlocked the door. They reached the door and pulled it open, coming face to face with Martin Brenner.

The pair stepped back as Brenner's smiling face stepped out of the doorway. Behind him, a soldier came out with Joyce and Hopper handcuffed. The soldier threw them to the ground and trained a pistol on them.

"Don't try anything else. I hate to cause anymore pain today," Brenner said. He then delivered a swift kick to Hopper's side. El glared at him. "Leave them alone you bastard." El said. Brenner seemed to smile wider.

"You have a lot of nerve showing your shit eating face again." Mike snarled. Brenner began laughing, especially when his men came in dragging the rest of the Party. "I forgot how much spirit youth had." Brenner said approaching El and Mike.

Brenner pulled a paper from his suit and handed it to El. "This is what makes what I do legal." Brenner said. El snatched the paper from his hand and both Mike and El read it.

It was an order from the President to retrieve subject Eleven by any means necessary. The US Government had just declared her as property. Mike was seething with rage. Brenner continued to smile.

"I showed you that, so you know the steps I will take if you don't come willingly. I will execute each of these people, starting with this surrogate mother of yours." Brenner said kicking Joyce in the side. "You wouldn't be so smug if I wasn't handcuffed." Joyce snarled.

"If you keep defying me, well, look up." Brenner said. They both looked to the skies and saw it, a plane circling Hawkins. "That plane has a massive payload that I will authorize to wipe out this ignorant little town." Brenner said, his smile now becoming more feral.

Tears welled in El's eyes as she saw these men were ready to kill innocents, just to get her back. She lowered her head and faced Mike.

"No, this isn't fair." Mike said, tears coming down his own face. El pulled Mike into a hug. He held her for dear life, wishing he could take her far away from this nightmare.

"It's ok Mike. I'll be fine. I won't let others die for me. I can live knowing you all are safe." She said. Mike looked down at her and with his courage waning, delivered a deep passionate kiss to her. When they broke apart, El reached for her necklace, a charm Mike had gotten her for Valentine's Day, and handed it to him. "I love you El. I will always love you." Mike said. She smiled sadly. "I love you to." She said. She then walked over to Hopper and Joyce. Using her powers, she set them up. Brenner motioned for his men to stand at ease. He knew he had won.

"El, please no. You can't go." Hopper said, tears of his own falling down his face. El was still crying, as she pulled her dad into a hug. "I have to Dad. I can't let you all get hurt. Not for me." She said. "Sweetie, we would gladly sacrifice more for you. We just don't want you to go," Joyce said. El looked to her mother and pulled her into a hug as well. "I won't forget you." She said.

She turned to Brenner, despite still crying she faced him. "You leave them alone. You stay way from them." She said. Brenner nodded, "They were expendable, no need to worry about them," Brenner said.

A soldier came to El and placed a bag over her head and led her away. Once she was in a vehicle, the car left. Brenner then walked up to Mike and placed a hand on his shoulder. "No hard feelings huh?" He said.

Mike punched Brenner square in the jaw. He fell back in surprise. He then began laughing. "Oh you have spunk all right." He said picking himself up. "Here is the rules now. You will all be watched. If you

think about coming after me, or try to retrieve Subject Eleven, I will kill her. If she tries to escape, I will kill you all and then I may just sterilize this town off the face of the earth. Am I understood?" Brenner said with a snarl. Mike gave him a curt nod. "And now, it's over. Go about your lives. Pretend she never existed. Because as of now, Jane Hopper is gone." He said. He gathered his men and they left. Will and Dustin ran to Hopper and Joyce and began uncuffing them. Joyce gripped onto Hopper, sobbing uncontrollably with him as their daughter was taken.

Mike knelt to the ground. His entire world just ended. Max was sobbing into Lucas, who was also letting tears fall freely. Will was pulled into the hug with Joyce and Hopper. Dustin walked over to Mike and knelt with him. None spoke as they cried. Mike looked to the retreating cars. Brenner was going to pay for this. One day he would.

*15 years later- July 15th 2001*

The alarm woke Mike from his sleep. He looked around, bleary eyed and confused. When he realized he was in his apartment in Indianapolis, he centered himself. It was the dream again. The day he lost the first love of his life. Mike gets out of bed and begins doing his morning workout. 100 pushups, 100sit ups, and a few sets on his weight equipment.

After that fateful day, Mike declared he would not be helpless again. He started paying more attention in gym class. Hopper taught him how to work out and Virgil Sinclair taught him and the rest of the Party how to fight. Over time, his friends had given up with workouts but Mike kept them up, mostly now out of habit.

He took martial arts in collage, where he majored in computer science and minored in English literature. Now he worked at a tech firm, keeping busy most days as they developed new software. Mike though, kept a few other skills fresh. His collage roommate taught him how to hack, a skill that Mike used occasionally to look into Martin Brenner's activities. Not that he needed to anymore. One day on the news he saw the smug bastard in a confirmation hearing as Secretary of Energy. Mike felt sick seeing his nemesis get put in a high office in government.

Mike tried not to think too much about how things have gone. He steps into the shower after his workout and cleans off the sweat from his workout. Mike got out of the shower and saw a voicemail on his answering machine. He hit the button and the automatic voice said he had one new message.

"Hey Mike, call me back ASAP. I need to talk to you about Harrison this weekend." Max said. Mike grabbed the phone and dialed her number.

"Hey asshole, why didn't you pick up?" Max asked. She said it with affection, or at least as much affection as she could, considering their history.

"Sorry, I was in the shower. What's going on with Harrison?" Mike asked. Harrison was his son with Max, during their brief relationship four years ago. They both considered it a nice distraction. And Mike loved his son to death. He helped Mike forget about his heartache because Harrison was born out of love. Even if they both were together after Lucas and Max broke up for the thousandth time. But during that brief relationship, Mike realized that while he loved Max, he didn't *Love* her. The feeling was mutual and they shared custody of their three year old.

"Look, I know it's your weekend with him, but mom wants to take Harrison for the weekend. She never gets to do grandma things since Billy moved back to California." Max said. Mike groaned. He loved Susan to death, ever since she divorced that scumbag Neil Hargrove she was practically a third mom. But she also really loves being a grandma and when Billy took his family back to California she started wanting to spend more time with Harrison. Luckily it usually once a month. "Ok, fine. But I want him next weekend." Mike said. Max laughed. "Hey, for this, you can keep him for two weeks." Max said. That perked him up.

"That sounds like a great idea. Thank you." Mike said. "No doofus, thank you. Mom really appreciates this." She said.

"All right, well I gotta get ready for work, talk later." Mike said. Max said her own good byes and hung up the phone.

Mike put on a dress shirt and black slacks as his coffee brewed. He was finishing putting on his shoes when a knock came to his door. Curious, Mike opened the door and saw a strange sight.

It was dressed in a black trench coat, wearing what seemed to be a motorcycle helmet with no visor. The face on the helmet was cold and black. It was maybe 5'4" to Mike's 6'2". Mike looked warily at the new figure

"Michael Wheeler?" A digitized voice asked. "Yea, that's me, what do you want?" He asked.

The figure in black surprised him by delivering a powerful kick into Mike and sent him backwards. Mike fell to the floor as the black figure strode into the apartment. Mike got up and dodged a punch from the figure. Mike then delivered a punch of his own into the helmet. It hurt his hand with how tough it was. The figure grabbed his arm and flung him onto his kitchen table. Mike was hurting as the figure grabbed a knife from his kitchen counter.

The figure was about to deliver a stab into Mike but he rolled out of the way and kicked the figure in the head, knocking it off balance. Mike jumped up, grabbed his coffee pot and smashed the pot into the figure's head. He then grabbed the figure and punched it in the stomach. It recoiled but then grabbed Mike by his shirt and hoisted him up. The figure was about to stab Mike when it seemed to be looking at something. Using the knife, the figure checked the waffle charm that Mike wore around his neck. It stared for a long moment before dropping Mike on the floor. It began shaking, and let out an ear piercing scream. Mike's windows blew out and the figure fell to its knees, not moving.

Mike took this as an advantage and rushed out of the apartment. He must have been hallucinating when he thought he heard a small voice, "Mike?" It said. Mike looked around and just saw the black figure. He then ran to the garage.

It was a short elevator ride to the parking garage, and he began walking to his Mercury Grand Marquis. It was a tank of a car that he got last year. He got into his car and started it. He then began driving, heading down the five floors quickly. As he reached the bottom floor,

several men in suits got his attention. These were government agents. He hit the gas and accelerated quickly.

Two SUV's tried to block his exit, but he managed to get away with just a scrape at his passenger side. He made it out of the garage and floored it out to the street. In his rearview mirror, he sees a man step out and give him a two finger salute.

### *Bravo Company*

The leader known as Jericho saluted his prey. He was amused by the spunk he showed. His second in command, a muscular Hispanic man named Lopez approached him. "Get the helicopter ready, track him. And find out why the asset didn't eliminate him." Jericho ordered. Jericho was a slimmer man to Lopez, but no less dangerous. He wore a simple suit with a black tie, his .45 tucked into his shoulder holster. His men dressed similarly, to blend in and to appear to be federal agents when in reality they were an elite mercenary unit. Jericho went to one of his vans and pulled the door open, a german man with wild hair was looking at monitors. "Your bucket of bolts failed. You said that thing was field certified." Jericho said simply. The man, Doctor Hans Strauss, looked up from his monitors and fixed a glare to Jericho.

"It was field tested. But even advanced technology still has glitches." He said getting out of his chair. The pair walked to the elevator and headed to the fifth floor apartment. Inside, they saw the asset kneeling on the ground, unmoving.

"So Doc, what happened?" Jericho asked. Strauss shrugged his shoulders. "My hypothesis is only rudimentary but it seems it had a sensory overload." Strauss said as he began working on the helmet.

"Ok, keep it away from coffee, got it." Jericho said motioning to the coffee on the floor. He looked at the photos on a mantle. He was slightly surprised his quarry was a nerd. Lots of pictures of him and his friends throughout the years. One that stood out was a younger version of him in 1984 at something called the Snow Ball. The girl with him doesn't seem to be in the later pictures. "Must have been some woman." Jericho said.



The phone rings and Jericho answers it, just to be polite. "Is it done?" The cold voice on the other end asks. "Shit, it's their client. No, he got away, your secret weapon blew a fuse and somehow this nerd can drive a car really well. But we'll catch him," Jericho says.

"Good, catch him alive and let the asset finish him. Do that and I will triple your salary," He said. Jericho let out a low whistle, that was a lot of money. "What did this guy do to deserve this level of work?" He asks,

"That's classified. I am paying you to track, not ask questions. Now get back to work." He said slamming his receiver down. Lopez had entered the room with Nicholi and Smiley, two more members of his squad.

He looked at his men and the mad scientist working on the asset. "Ok, new plan. Smiley, get me all the intel you can on Michael Wheeler. His friends, his family, his likes, his dislikes. I want it all." He says. Smiley nods and heads out. "Did the chopper find him?" He asks. Nicholi nods. "Good, you get the others, we are going to catch him." Jericho says. "Who was that on the phone?" Lopez asks,

"Our employer, The Secretary of Energy. Dr. Martin Brenner."

AN: As always, please read and review. I have three chapters of this and i am working on a 4th. I will try and publish the whole thing along the week

## 2. Chapter 2

Mike drove, keeping himself at the speed limit. He remembered when Steve taught him how to drive. His dad hadn't been interested in showing him and Nancy had moved to New York, so Officer Harrington showed him how

### *Hawkins 1988*

"Ok Tallest shithead, ease up on the gas." Steve said as he let Mike drive his BMW. Mike was still slightly nervous to be driving Steve's car. But he was tired of biking. Sure it was great exercise, but on top of his other "studies" he really wanted to make things convenient for himself

"So, what if I wanted to evade someone?" Mike asked. Steve briefly choked on his coffee. "You what?" He asked. Mike shrugged. He still held hope he would find El and bring her home. Steve grimaced at the thought, he beat himself up for not being there. Hopper assured him that there was nothing that could be done, but those were his shitheads and he wasn't there for them. "Well, for starters, don't drive like a maniac, drive quickly but look like your just in a hurry." Steve explained.

Mike took those lessons well. Mike was determined then.

### *The present*

Mike pulled into the parking lot for the Alexander Hotel. He looked up and saw their was a helicopter in the air. "Damnit. I need to get out of sight." Mike said to himself. He quickly ducked into the hotel lobby.

He decided he needed a way to hide. He saw several bellhops and got an idea.

### *Jericho*

He sat in the back of the RV and began looking over his gear. "What is the situation?" He heard Lopez talking to the helicopter pilot. "He

ran into the Alexander Hotel. He might be trying to lose us in their" He said.

Kid was smart, Jericho thought. Jericho put down his rifle and grabbed a .45. "Leave the rifles, we keep pretending we are feds." Jericho said. His men nodded at him. He put the .45 in his shoulder holster and put his .44 magnum in his rear holster. He put his blazer back on and readjusted his hated tie. He preferred his BDU's but for now this will have to do.

### *Mike*

Getting into the employee changing room was child's play. Mike quickly put on a bellhop uniform and began doing work.

"I never seen you here before." The front desk woman asked. She was an older woman in her forties. Black hair and a severe look on her face. "I'm new, just started today." Mike said and gave her a smile. She glared at him, but pointed to a family. "Take their bags to room 214." She said. Mike gave her a small salute and went to the guests. They looked positively bored and Mike tried to keep the smile going as he grabbed their bags, which were heavier than he was used to. He guided them to the elevator, hoping his memory of the place from four years ago holds up.

As he entered the elevator with the small family, he caught a glimpse of several new arrivals. One was the man he saw saluting him as he escaped the parking garage.

### *Jericho*

The group entered the lobby, Jericho heading for the front desk. The severe woman with dark hair gave him a slight smile. "May I help you?" She said. Jericho gave her a half smile, before pulling out a photo of Michael that he had. "I am looking for this man, he may be inside this hotel." He said. The woman looked at the photo. She recognized him as the new bellhop. She looked at the man, he didn't look at all like a cop. He didn't even present a badge. The kid was hiding and these men were obviously criminals.

"Sorry, I haven't seen him." She said flatly. Jericho made a grimace.

"Well, can I see your security footage?" He asked. She fixed him with a stare. "Only hotel management can authorize that with a search warrant." She said. She saw through him. Jericho gave her a smile and walked away. He made his way to Lopez

"Spread out and find him. He is not leaving here." Jericho said.

*Mike*

After taking the family to their rooms, and getting a nice \$20 tip, Mike snuck over to the server room that was located in the basement. He carefully moved through the hallways, checking for signs of the room he needed while also hoping to avoid the agents that had him cornered.

He walked into the server room and found his way to the remote feed of the security cameras. He grabbed a blank CD from one of the shelves and found the image of the man. He was at the front desk and was shot down by the front desk lady. Mike smiled to himself as he loaded the footage onto the CD and placed it into a case. He needed to get out of the building and quick. An idea comes to Mike and he smiles. Mike heads over to a nearby office and dials a number. "911 What is your emergency?" the dispatcher says.

"Yes, there are several armed men in the hotel Alexander lobby. They don't seem to be cops." Mike said.

*Jericho*

He noticed the cops, and he rolled his eyes. They were spread around, hoping Michal would show up and they could subdue him but he guessed the kid had a few tricks. One cop walked up to him, looking very stern.

"Excuse me sir, we have a report of a gentleman with your description walking around here armed." He said. Jericho nodded. "Yea, I have a piece. I thought I was allowed to carry." Jericho said. The cop shook his head. "No sir, you can't have guns on these premises. Not unless you are law enforcement." He said. Jericho grumbled, if he tried a fake badge it would be recognized and he would be arrested. "Just take your weapon to your vehicle and you

can return." The cop said. Jericho nodded and motioned for his men to follow.

As they walked to their cars, Jericho heard an alarm go off. The group turned and saw the fire alarm system had gone off. Jericho smirked, the cops were going to have a problem getting the crowd under control.

"The kid thinks he can slip out. Go in their and bring that little shit out." Jericho ordered. His men nodded. "I also don't care what condition he is in," He said. His men smiled and rushed in, silently blending with the crowd.

### *Mike*

To keep things authentic, Mike did start a few fires down in the basement. Small trashcan fires. Mike then headed to the lobby, hoping to blend in with the crowd and escape. He was almost at the stairs when he saw a pair of men come from the same stairs he was going to use. Both men were wearing black suits. One was a Hispanic man and the other a white man. Mike ducked back into the server room.

The white guy entered the server room, he pulled out his pistol from his shoulder holster and began doing his sweeps. Mike needed to take him out. He ducked around and found some thick cables. He grabbed a handful and snuck around. The man searched around, occasionally looking between the server stacks. While he was walking between two server towers when Mike struck. He lashed at his gun arm with the thick cables and knocked the weapon out of his hand.

The man was surprised, then Mike punched him in the face with a fist wrapped in the thick cables. Before he could react again, Mike knocked him off his feet with a leg sweep then delivered another punch to the face, knocking him out.

Mike searched the man and found some zip ties in his pocket. He dragged him into a closet, tied his wrists and stuffed him inside. Mike left the room, holding a serving tray. He had a few ready made excuses for why he didn't leave when the fire alarm came on.

Mike looked outside the server room area and couldn't find the other one. It was fine by Mike since the basement was large. He walked quickly to the stairs when someone came out behind him.

"Hey man, what are you doing here? There's an evacuation." A man with a Spanish accent said behind him. Mike turned around, about to tell him he thought it was a prank. The man looked at him and Mike realized he was made. The man pulled his gun out and Mike threw the serving tray at him. It knocked the gun out of his hand and gave Mike the chance to close the distance.

Mike tackled the man, lifted him up and slammed him to the ground. The move shocked the man, but he regained his composure and got back up.

"Pretty good man. But I'm better." He said pulling a knife out. Mike's eyes went wide, he hated knives. The man came at him and slashed at Mike. He backed away and grabbed his wrist. He then pulled the attacker toward him, shaking his balance and punched the side of his face. While he was dazed, Mike punched his wrist and knocked the knife from his hand.

Mike shoved the man back and kicked him hard. It seemed to daze him and Mike decided to make a break for it. Whatever daze came over the other man was temporary as he ran after Mike. He caught up to him and grabbed Mike by the back of his hair and slammed him to the ground. He delivered a powerful kick to Mike's side. He groaned in pain as the man delivered another kick.

"Yea, thought you were tough, but I guess you were just another punk." The man said. Mike snarled. When the man tried to kick him again, Mike grabbed his leg, and rolled away, taking him down. Mike got up and lunged at him. He delivered a series of blows to the man's face. When he felt he was dazed enough, Mike pulled a pair of zip ties from his pocket and tied his wrists. He then dragged him into the server room, and shut him in. Mike then ran and made his escape to the stairs.

Once he got to the lobby, a firefighter spotted him. "Hey, you. What are you doing here? Didn't you hear the alarm?" The fireman said. Mike shook his head. "No, I was in the can." Mike said. He was sill

hurting from the other man's kicks. The fireman grabbed him by the arm and escorted him out.

Mike looked around for his car. He knew it was being watched but he hoped he could get away. He spotted it where it was parked and saw the leader and a few more of his men sitting on the hood. The leader had not noticed Mike yet. Mike needed a further distraction when a hand grabbed his shoulder. It was the front desk lady.

"Those men have are not feds." She said. Mike figured they weren't when nobody showed him a badge. She handed him her car keys. "My car is on the other side. Get out of here." She said. Mike gave her a grateful smile and snuck away, discarding the bellhop jacket.

He found the car, a station wagon, in the rear of the hotel where the employees parked. Looking around, he sees that he is alone. Mike gets in the car and drives off. He needs to find sanctuary.

### *Will Byers*

A sharp knock on his door has Will looking out the window of his apartment. He sees a man in a suit at his door. Will grimaces and hopes its not another damn Jehovah's Witness. Will opens the door and the man in the suit looks up. He is a short man with cropped hair and glasses. He gives Will a small smile. "Hello, are you by chance Will Byers?" He asked. Will nodded. "Great. I need to ask some questions about Mike Wheeler." He said. Will was confused. "Is Mike in trouble?" Will asked.

"He might be. Can I come in." He asked. Will shook his head. "Sorry, don't know you or who your with." Will said. The man smiled and pulled a badge from his pocket. "Adam Smiley, FBI." He said. Will looked at the badge. Having lived with his step dad for a while, he could spot a fake badge a mile away. Will decided not to play his hand just yet. He might learn more from him.

Will gestured him inside. He led the man into the kitchen. The living room was visible from the kitchen and had articles of clothes strewn about.

"Sorry for the mess. My boyfriend becomes a drama queen when he is

running late for work." Will said. Adam merely nodded. Will was surprised, most guys would be uncomfortable with the idea of being alone with a gay man. Some old bigotry about them trying to turn them gay. Will made a second cup and offered him coffee. Adam shook his head.

"So, what kind of trouble is Mike in?" Will asked. Adam began. "He may have stolen military secrets. Has he been acting erratic to you?" Adam asked. Will shook his head. "No, Mike would never do something that dumb." Will said. Not adding that he wouldn't do anything that dumb without involving the rest of the group. Despite everyone nearing their thirties, Party rules still applied.

"So Mike tends to do dumb things?" Adam asked. Will smirked. "Yea, but its more like over exerting himself. Guy likes to work out. He was really bad about it in high school." Will said.

### *High School*

Yea, Mike was really bad about working out. So much so, Will often had to get him from the gym. It had been a year since El was taken. They all felt the after effects of missing her. Will felt just as empty as the rest. Will felt he lost family that day, which was mostly true even though Hopper and his mom hadn't gotten married yet, Will still saw El as his sister.

He found Mike doing his reps. Shaking his head, Will walked over with a water bottle. "You know I's unhealthy to work out this much without hydrating right?" Will asked. Mike fixed him a glare. "I just started. Had a run in with that new girl, Suzie." Mike said. "Define run in." Will said.

"Some assholes were playing keep away with her bible and I got mad." Mike said as he put the bar bell back. "Well that was nice of you. Don't tell Max you were nice to a new girl or she might get pissy" Will said. Mike gave a small laugh. "Max was there. She might give me an earful later." Mike said.

Suzie Pizzolo was a recent transfer from Utah. She was a Mormon and was frequently picked on because of it. Will found the good Christians slightly hypocritical for judging someone for not following



their brand of faith. What surprised everyone was she knew Dustin from summer camp and the two were always off building some form of gadget.

The Party was hesitant to accept her, mostly because of Mike's cold treatment of Max, but were surprised when Mike warmed up to the girl. Probably because it was hard to hate such a bubbly person. Max made sure to give Mike shit over that a lot.

"Well, Nancy sent me to find you. She thinks you spend too much time in here." Will said. Mike groaned. "A couple of hours a day and you guys think I am obsessed with working out." He said.

"No, your obsessed with finding El. This is just a means to help her when you find her." Will said. He hated that. In all honesty, Will gave up the idea of finding El six months after she was taken. The US government took her, and the mere idea of looking for her was laughable. But they kept the dream alive for Mike, a constant argument between Max and the rest of the Party.

"Yea. I do hope to find her. But Nancy's right, I might be pushing you guys away." Mike said. Will smiled and helped Mike off the bench.

"I think we should let Suzie play D&D with us this weekend. Dustin helped her roll her character. Halfling fighter." Will said. Mike laughed, that was going to be fun. "Yea, I'll get Dustin to invite her later." Mike said and the pair left the weight room.

### *The Present*

Adam cleared his throat and Will snapped out of his flashback. "I'm sorry. I don't really know what to tell you, other than take your fake badge out of my home." Will said, dropping the pretense. Adam began reaching for his service weapon when Will had a sawn off shotgun already in his face, he kept one hidden in the kitchen, much to the chagrin of his boyfriend Chad.

"What, you thought I didn't recognize a fake badge?" Will said. Adam put his hands up. "Now, get out of my home and don't ever come back." Will said. Adam walked out and ran for his car.

## *Jericho*

"The bastard out ran us." Jericho said. His men looked at him confused. "He should be out here. We should have spotted him by now." Jericho said, frustration building up. What tipped him over the edge was when he saw Lopez and Nicolai walked out of the hotel, looking worse for wear.

"What the shit just happened?" Jericho growled. Nicolai shook his head in embarrassment. "Guy had some moves. He took us out." Lopez said. "I sent two of my best after some geek and he kicked your asses?" Jericho was not happy. "Boss, it's Smiley." One of his men, Sanders, handed him a radio.

"Please tell me you have good news." Jericho said. "No sir, I got made and he pulled a shotgun on me. I dunno what the hell is going on anymore." Smiley said. Jericho agreed. "We need to catch his trail before Brenner finds out we shat the bed." Jericho said.

"I can look into a few more leads." Smiley said as he killed the radio line. Jericho rounded up his men and headed for the RV and vans.

## *Indianapolis suburbs*

Dustin Henderson was getting ready for work when the phone rang. "Fortress Henderson, how may I direct your call." Dustin said. He recognized Will on the other end laughing. "Hey man, how's your morning going?" Will asked.

"It's going ok, getting ready for work, what's up?" He asked. "I had a weird visitor by a guy claiming to be FBI. He wasn't, but he was looking for Mike." Will said. Dustin's face got serious.

"What's going on with Mike?" Dustin asked. He could hear Will shrug. "I dunno, but assume anyone asking for Mike is not a friendly. I'm going to call Max and warn her and Lucas." Will said. Dustin agreed.

After hanging up with Will, Dustin's wife walked out of the bathroom, she was just getting done with an overnight shift at the hospital where she was a nurse. "Dusty Bum, who was that?" The perky, yet tired voice of Suzie asked from the bedroom.

"That was Will. Mike is in trouble. Some guys claiming to be feds are looking for him." Dustin said. Suzie rushed out, just changed into her pajamas. "Mike? He wouldn't do anything without telling us would he?" She asked. Dustin shook his head. "He wouldn't do anything to jeopardize Harrison. He loves that boy too much." Dustin said.

*Three years ago*

Dustin and Suze walked into the maternity ward of the hospital. Both had exhausting days but made a trip out to see their newest party member. Dustin had a stuffed bear and Suzie hand made a blanket for the occasion.

They found the room quickly and walked in seeing Lucas and Mike hugging. Dustin breathed a sigh of relief, despite the happy day Lucas and Mike were still testy with each other. "He's a beautiful boy. You should be a proud dad." Lucas said, his own tears falling from his face. Mike had a wide grin on his face. He looked over and saw Dustin and Suzie enter the room.

"Oh good, you two didn't kill each other." Suzie said. Both Lucas and Mike laughed.

"Yea, I think Max will kill us if we fought today." Lucas said. Mike nodded. They turned around to find a sleeping Max, exhausted from childbirth. In a small crib next to Max was a bundle of blue blanket.

"Come here and meet Harrison James Wheeler." Mike said. The names came from Max's dad and Mike's respect for Jim Hopper, who sadly couldn't come due to having the flu. Suzie and Dustin walked over and saw him. Suzie let out a slight squeal and Dustin had a large grin looking at the newborn.

A pang of regret came over Dustin, the past year had been a rollercoaster with the Party fighting over Mike and Max's brief relationship. Honestly Dustin would have preferred it be Max and Lucas having a kid, or even Mike and El, but in Dustin's heart El was dead. He looked at Mike, who was beaming at his small son. Okay, sure it didn't work out the way anyone planned, but that was life.

"Well, he has lots of uncles and aunts who love him already." Dustin

said. Mike offered to let his friend hold his son and Dustin gladly took him. The baby cooed in his sleep and Dustin knew he was going to be the uncle who let him get away with everything.

### *The Present*

Dustin grabbed his car keys and kissed Suzie goodbye. "Get some rest, and call me if Mike shows up." He said. "Will do Dusty bum." She said as Dustin left the house.

Suzie was worried about Mike, he usually was a bit more level headed than the rest of the Party. But she couldn't do anything now and headed off to get some sleep.

A few hours later, Suzie woke up to pounding at the back door. She got up quickly, put a robe on and made her way to the door. She looked through the peephole and saw Mike outside. She opened the door and let him in.

"Mike, holy shit are you okay?" She asked. Mike shook his head. "I've had a hell of a morning. I'll tell you about it if you can get me some food." Mike said. Suzie nodded and walked him to the kitchen. Suzie fixed him up some French toast and noticed him favoring one side of himself.

"Take your shirt off." Suzie said. Mike gave her a look. "I can tell your hurt, now take your shirt off so I can see." She said. Mike was still hesitant. He hated having anyone worry about him. Suzie knew this, and had a way to get him to comply.

"If you don't take your damn shirt off I'm going to smack you one." Suzie said threatening him with a spatula. Mike's eyes went wide. All feared Suzie's spatula, even Max.

Mike slowly unbuttoned his shirt and carefully pulled it off. He had Suzie help him with his undershirt. He looked down and saw a massive bruise on his ribcage. "Owchies." Mike said with a grimace. Suzie quickly put the French Toast on a plate and looked at Mike's ribs.

"Well, they aren't broken as far as I can tell, but you need to take it

easy." She said.

"Sure, I'll tell the heavily armed men and their robot to take it easy on hunting me." Mike said. Suzie raised an eyebrow. "Robot?" She questioned. Mike took in a deep breath and began explaining.

Mike finished his toast while he told the tale of his morning. Once he finished, Suzie had a few questions. "How did you guess it was a robot?" She asked. He shrugged his shoulders. "The way it talked, the way it hit. It was small but it packed a punch. Plus hitting it hurt my hand. Not just its head, but also its body." Mike said.

"Also, why did it suddenly malfunction?" Suzie asked. Again Mike merely speculated, "Must have been overloaded, I dunno, I was trying to get out of there." He said. Mike pulled out the CD case from his back pocket and handed it to her.

"This is some screenshots I took of the men who were chasing me. I wanna know if you can hack the military database and find out about them?" Mike asked. Suzie smiled. Her other hobby was some light hacking. She grabbed the case and saw how tired Mike was.

"Couch, Now!" She ordered. Mike smiled and nodded. He grabbed a blanket from a closet and crashed on the couch. Suzie smiled as Mike fell asleep. She liked Mike, she thought he was a great story teller. She said as much their first D&D session. Suzie went to the phone and called Dustin and told him Mike was on the couch. Dustin breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'll be home in a few hours. Love you Suzie Poo." Dustin said. Suzie laughed. "Love you to Dusty Bum." She said as she hung up.

She pulled out the CD and began working while Mike slept. They were a party, and when a party member required assistance, they were bound to help.

AN: Tell me what you think, i always look forward to feedback.

### 3. Chapter 3

Suzie worked hard through the afternoon. She took care to keep her tracks covered as she went through military databases. She looked over and saw Mike still asleep on the couch. She worried about him, in the same way she worried about all of her friends and family. Granted, being Mike's friend was never easy, but the man always had the Party's back. She remembered when he really became her friend.

#### *High School*

Suzie was walking past the gym when they jumped her. A group of boys led by Troy Walsh came out of a stair well and pushed her down. One grabbed her backpack off of her while the rest held her down. Suzie tried to fight their grip but they were too strong. One of the assholes pulled out her bible.

"Oh yea, this retard doesn't worship Jesus like the rest of us." Troy snarled. Suzie rolled her eyes, how little this wastoid knew, but she didn't think now was the time to argue faith while being pinned down.

Troy then pulled out pages from her bible, tossing the pages around. "Stop it, that's my parents!" She cried. James laughed as Suzie began crying.

"Get off of her NOW!" A voice came from behind them. Troy looked over and laughed. "Oh look, it's Frogface!" Troy said. Suzie looked over and saw Mike Wheeler walking out of the locker room. She was slightly relieved to see him.

Mike was angry, seeing four boys /attacking a girl over something dumb but once he realized it was Suzie, Mike was going to hurt someone. "Why don't you make us, Frogface." Troy said. Mike needed no other invitation.

He went for the first boy, Hank, and punched him across the face. Mike grabbed him by the back of his shirt, and slammed his head into another boy's face. Mike dropped Hank and grabbed the stunned boy, a skittish boy named Grey, and kned him in the stomach. That

was enough to drop Grey as he fell down gasping for air.

James got up, allowing Suzie to get away, and walked towards Mike. He had gotten bigger as they entered High School, and Mike wasn't sure he could fight him. Mike though had not made sound and rational decisions lately.

James sent a punch towards Mike's head, who ducked down and rushed past him and delivered an elbow blow to his back. Pressing his advantage, Mike kicked the back of James knee and brought him down. Mike then delivered a powerful kick to the back of his head and knocked him down.

Mike looked over and saw Troy struggling to pull his knife out of his pocket. Mike rushed him and tackled him to the ground. He began punching Troy in the face, hoping to end this soon. Mike didn't notice till he heard Suzie yell "Look out!" as he felt himself pulled off Troy by James. James threw him into a wall with Mike hitting the ground hard. As Mike tried to get up, James kicked him hard in the side, knocking Mike back down. James then grabbed him by the back of his shirt and held him against the wall.

He felt every blow James launched at his face and body. From a corner, Mike saw Troy get up and finally pull his knife out. "Hold him still, I need to carve him up good." He said. James pulled him into a hold and Mike could see the giddy excitement on Troy's face. "I think I'll carve my name on your forehead." Troy said. James grabbed his head and put it in a chokehold. As Troy was about to put the blade to Mike's head, Suzie surprised him and sprayed a can of her hairspray in his face. Mike closed his eyes as she sprayed into James' face as well. He let Mike go as the spray started irritating his face. Troy was swinging his knife wildly, trying to cut at something. Suzie kicked Troy in his knees and knocked him down, while Mike grabbed James arm and tossed him over his shoulder and landed him on top of Troy. Both boys fell unconscious.

Suzie moved to Mike who was resting against a wall. "You stupid boy, why didn't you go for help?" She screeched. Mike gave her a wry smile. "No time and I didn't know what they were about to do to you. Plus I kinda needed the exercise." He said. Suzie lightly scowled at him. "Well let's get out of here before we get in trouble," Suzie said.

Mike nodded and helped pick up the pages that were ripped out of her bible.

"Thank you." She said as she grabbed the pages. Hopefully she could fix it. "No need to thank me, I know I can be a bit standoffish but you are one of us." Mike said. Suzie smiled slightly.

She knew Mike from Dustin and she moved to town a couple of months ago when her dad's job relocated him. Suzie met Dustin in 85' at science camp and the two were somewhat romantic partners. When she moved to Hawkins, Dustin had been excited, probably more than she was to see him. When she arrived, Dustin had introduced his friends. They had seemed nice enough, except for Mike who was very standoffish. But Suzie saw it in the entire group. They were broken.

She had been taking it slow with them but to hear Mike thought of her as one of them, it lifted her spirits. She noticed Mike was limping slightly. "Cmon, let's get you patched up," She said as she helped Mike.

### *Present day*

Suzie was brought out of her musings by a page coming up, telling her she got in. She looked at the page and saw a lack of information about the men hunting her friend. Lot's of references to men being recruited from all over the world. The leader, the one Mike described, had his name redacted in several pages. All she found was a name, Bravo Company.

### *Bravo Company- Alexander Hotel*

Jericho sat by one of the trucks he used when one of his men informed him of a new arrival. He looked over and groaned. He was 5'7", bald, wore blue shirts and had Italian ancestry. Saverio Alacqua had arrived. He was the chief of staff for Dr. Brenner and he had a smile on his face.

"So, I hire the best trackers in the world to get a damn nerd and somehow you messed that up." He said. Jericho grumbled at the insult.



"Yes, one nerd who also happens to be CIA trained." Jericho said. Saverio looked at him confused. "Our intelligence didn't say anything about CIA training. I can get you the file." He said.

"Oh yea, he has some kind of government training, he took out two of my men and used a fire alarm as an escape plan. Mind telling me why the Secretary of Energy wants him dead?" Jericho asked.

"Top secret about that, hell I don't know why." Saverio said. Jericho didn't believe him. The entire operation from the start had been half truth's and lies, typically from Saverio. Hell, Jericho didn't know for weeks he was working for the Energy Department, much less the Secretary himself.

"So, what do you plan to do?" Saverio asked. Jericho gave him a glare. He hated being questioned. "I need to run him to ground. I need access to your media contacts" Jericho said.

### *Sinclair Apartment*

Lucas checked the bag that had Harrison's clothes and a few toys. He looked over at the play pen and saw the boy making faces at him, ones that Lucas returned. He loved the little guy, mostly because he was part of Max. Lucas looked to the boy and began again pondering what he would be to the boy. He wasn't his father, a fact he was reminded of when he saw that the boy's copper hair looked like Mike's. He didn't like the idea of being Uncle Lucas, since to Lucas he was partially raising him.

It was a rough time the Party had when Max told them she was pregnant with Mike's baby. He still felt reminded of that fateful day.

### *Four Years Ago- Wheeler apartment*

Lucas walked to the door of his 'friends' apartment. Things had been icy with him and Mike since he started dating Max. Granted they were broken up at the time, but even Mike should have understood the bro code.

Max had called him over. She was still living with Mike despite their relationship being over for a month. Things were improving with her

and Lucas, right down to having civil conversations. Lucas gave a sharp knock on the door.

Mike answered, and he looked slightly annoyed at seeing Lucas. Mike was still not on good terms with him. Later, Lucas would be told that his treatment of Max was the reason for their disagreements, not the things Lucas had said about Mike.

Mike opened the door more and motioned Lucas to enter. He led him to the living room where Dustin and Will were talking with Max. Lucas noted the air was thick with tension. The relationship Mike and Max had didn't gone over well with the Party. Suzie was the peacemaker on this and she seemed to be absent

"Suzie had to cover a shift." Mike said, as if reading his mind. Lucas curtly nodded. He looked to Max and smiled inside. She looked at him and smiled back at him. She then gestured for everyone to sit down.

"Ok, I guess you want to know why I called you guys here." She said. She was nervous, that much was clear. The guys gave her reassuring smiles.

"So, I might as well get it out of the way. I'm pregnant." She said. Dustin and Will whooped, Will went to hug Max while Dustin went to Lucas. "Congrats Man." He said. Lucas glared at how dumb his friend was.

"It's not mine." He said. Dustin's smile faltered. "What do you mean? I thought you two got back together." He asked.

"No, we only just now started having civil conversations again." Lucas looked over and saw Mike was shocked. Despite living with her, she kept the news till she told the party. Lucas was not happy. He walked up to Mike and despite him being shocked by the news, Lucas striking him in the face shocked him, and the Party, more.

Lucas stormed out, with Max following him out. "What the fuck was that asshole?!" She yelled. Lucas turned on her.

"You leave me, shack up with him and now your having his kid?"

Lucas was furious. Max was taken aback by the anger in his voice. "What, you dump me and then get mad I am with Mike? You think I am your damn property?" Max says, her voice raising.

"I just thought.... I would be...." Lucas can barely keep his thought strait. Max just glared at him.

"I thought you would be mature enough to handle this. Clearly you aren't." She said. She stormed back inside, leaving Lucas out in the hallway.

Lucas was alone in the hallway, he could hear muffled talking coming from the apartment, some slight crying and a few cheers. It was too much for Lucas and he walked away. He had a lot of thinking to do.

### *Present Day*

It had taken Lucas six months to apologize. He honestly didn't mean for it to be that long but his job was hectic and he honestly thought the two were mad at him. It was when Dustin tricked him into coming to his house for a celebration that he found Mike and Max there. He walked up to them and told them he wished he could undo the past year and found himself being hugged by both of them.

Three months after Harrison was born, Max moved back in. It was an adjustment, but he felt things were on track with both of them. So much so that he had a little box hidden away in his sock drawer.

Max walked into the bedroom, giving Lucas a quick kiss before heading to Harrison. "How is mommy's little man? Ready to go see grandma?" She asked as she picked up the toddler. Lucas smiled, motherhood was a weird reaction to the normally stoic Max. Harrison made squeeing noises in approval.

"I got his bag packed, you staying the night in Hawkins?" Lucas asked. Max nodded. "It's a long damn drive down there. But mom is taking Harrison to Mike's on Monday. Then he has him for two weeks." She said. He nodded in approval.

"Well, best get going before traffic gets bad. See you later babe." She said, and kissed him. Lucas hugged the two and smiled as Harrison

reached for him. Lucas picked him out of Max's arms, gave him a hug as well and returned him to his mother. "You be good for Grandma Susan, ya hear." Lucas said. The child made a noise that sounded like agreement.

After the pair left, Lucas went to the kitchen and began making lunch. He turned on the TV for background noise. He starts on his sandwich and he looks at the TV and does a double take.

On the screen is Mike, and the news report is talking like he is a criminal.

"Once again, the FBI is looking at the whereabouts of Michael Wheeler in suspicion of collaborating with a known terror group. Anyone with knowledge of his whereabouts are encouraged to contact local police or the FBI hotline.

His phone rang and Lucas quickly picked it up. "What the fuck!" Lucas said. "Yea, I think I need to catch you up. Is Max there?" Will asked,

"No, she is taking Harrison to Hawkins. Spending the weekend with Susan." He said. Will sounded slightly relieved. "Okay, well some weird stuff just happened and Suzie just caught me up." Will says and then begins explaining the past few hours to him.

### *Henderson house*

Mike wakes up to see Suzie looking at him gravely. "Find anything?" He asks as he pulls the blanket off of him. Suzie shakes her head. "No, somehow a mercenary unit is more classified than Area 51." She says and shows him the screen.

Almost every name for the group that he got pictures of was heavily classified, even most of the men's home countries.

Their musings are cut short when Dustin loudly enters the house. "OHMYGODOHMYGODOHMYGOD!" He shouts as he runs inside.

"Dustin, what the fuck?" Mike asks. Instead of answering, Dustin turns the TV on to the local news. On screen is Mike's picture and he was wanted for terrorism. "Shit." Mike says, summing up his feelings.

He made his way towards the door but Suzie grabs his arm. "Where the hell do you think you're going?" She asks. Mike points to the door. "I am not letting you get in danger because of me." Mike says.

"Well, kinda too bad about that Mikey boy, party rules and all that." Dustin says. Mike rolls his eyes, he hated when Dustin invoked that. "Well, we can't stay here. We need to get as far from here as possible." Mike says. Suzie and Dustin nod in agreement.

Their musings are cut short as the power is cut inside the house. Before they can react, the back door and front door are broken open and a SWAT team moves in. They aim their guns at the group as they lift their hands in the air. Behind them, a man in a blue dress shirt walks in and gives them a smile.

"Mr. Wheeler, So good to make your acquaintance." He said.

AN: cliffhangers are the best aren't they?

## 4. Chapter 4

AN: Last time, Mike found himself captured by the Department of Energy. Can he escape them and rescue his friends? And can he also survive a face to face confrontation with the fiendish Jericho?

Jericho watched as the prisoners were brought in, black bags over their heads. He looked at the smug look that Saverio had. Jericho rolled his eyes. The media smear was a means to run Wheeler to ground. The next phase was to arrest his allies to force him out. It was a happy coincidence that Wheeler was at one of the homes. Jericho didn't care if Saverio took the credit for the capture, all that mattered was the job got done.

He sent a few of his men with the team that went to the Henderson's house. They looked a little scrawny to be soldiers. Jericho noticed one of the men had difficulty carrying his rifle. He walked up to the soldier, named Taylor, and helped him with his rifle.

"You really shouldn't carry weapons you are incapable of using." Jericho said, the kid was small and scrawny, not a soldier at all. Taylor shrugged. "Mr. Alacqua said soldiers use those. I'm just not used to the weight." He said. Jericho fixed him with a stare. "How many times have you been out in the field?" He asked. Taylor thought about it. "This is our first time actually out in the field, but we trained for months." He said. Jericho rolled his eyes.

"Where do you do your training?" Jericho asked. Taylor guided him to another room. Inside was several computers with doctors monitoring health signs as several people were hooked up to machines. Jericho looked dumbfounded.

"We get our training through VR. We learn a lot without actually being put in harms way." Taylor said. Jericho pinched the bridge of his nose. He had heard of this program, he also thought it was stupid. "Kid, VR training is fine and all, but if you never put it into practice, you will fail every time against a seasoned and well trained force." Jericho explained. Taylor didn't look convinced.

"We were able to capture Wheeler and his friends." He said. The

doors opened and four men came in, they looked worse for wear and had quite a few injuries. "The hell happened to you?" Jericho asked. One of the men looked up, his face bloody from a beating and took the lead. "We did as you asked and raided Will Byers apartment, he was ready for us and well, look at what he did." He explained.

Jericho wasn't angry, far from it, he was amused as these men were escorted to the medical facility. Saverio walked in, his face contorted with rage. "The men I sent to retrieve Lucas Sinclair and Max Mayfield came back empty handed. They look like they got their asses kicked." He said. He was trying to make this Jericho's fault. Jericho shrugged his shoulders.

"We have what we came for. Once we get this business over with we let the Henderson's go and let it blow over." Jericho said. Saverio was not having that. "They just humiliated my men. I need to teach them a lesson." Saverio said.

"We have our target. We already made a lot of noise with my plan but we got an unexpected result. Now, we let them go and let this blow over." Jericho said. Saverio huffed. "Plus. Your men aren't as well trained as you led me to believe." He said pointing at the VR machines. Saverio looked at him confused.

"This is state of the art training." He said. Jericho scoffed. "Your men can barely hold their weapons, much less fight as a unit. I am willing to bet if I didn't send a couple of my guys with the Henderson raid, we would be struggling to find them still." Jericho said. Saverio was still angry. "Well, once I am done with Wheeler, I will take my men's pain out on the Henderson's." He said. Jericho made a note to have one of his men to watch the Henderson's.

"You wanna watch me interrogate Mr. Wheeler Jerry?" Saverio asked. As he laughed, Jericho slammed him against a wall. "My name is Jericho, you will do well to remember that punk." He said and let him go. Saverio nodded and led him to the interrogation room's observation room.

### *Road to Hawkins*

Max was wore out from the drive to her mother's house. Sometimes

she wished she lived closer. She also wished Billy and Heather didn't move to San Diego. The thought of her terror of a brother being domesticated still made her laugh. He had met her when he was a lifeguard in 1985. It was a strange relationship. Speaking of strange, Max looked at the backseat and saw Harrison sound asleep. Car rides usually knocked him out.

She thought about Mike, the unusual father of her boy. The pair didn't have the best start to their friendship. First he was moody as hell over El being missing for a year, then the fact in July of 1985 El dumped Mike for a week and Mike kind of blamed Max. It wasn't her fault Mike lied to El because Hopper was tired of Mike being over all the damn time. Things had worked out and the two were inseparable love birds. Till 1986, when that bastard took El away.

Things were difficult. Max didn't have a happy home life and spent a ton of time with her friends. Except for Mike. The fact they weren't close friends and El's abduction made Max keep her distance. That was until that December.

### *December 1986*

Max was sitting in her room reading, trying to ignore the fight Billy and Neil were having. Neil hated Billy's girlfriend and made it known his displeasure. Max didn't know what the problem was, Heather was nice, but she also didn't take bullshit and has called Neil out a few times. Her dad was the owner of the Hawkins Post so Neil could never do anything to her. Billy on the other hand, Neil made his life hell. Max wished she could talk to El about all of this.

The thought of her lost friend hurt Max's heart. It was a few months since armed thugs put guns to them and forced El to surrender to that white haired asshole. She hadn't taken the experience well. Not as bad as Mike had. He still walked around like he lost a piece of himself. She wished she could do something for him, but it was awkward between the pair.

Her supercomm went off and Mike's voice came through. "Max, do you copy?" His voice came through frantic. Max grabbed the walkie and answered. "Yea, I copy Mike, whats going on, over?" She asked. She was pretty good with radio etiquette. "I need your help and



nobody is around. Can you come to my house?" He asked. Max was silent for a moment, he seemed freaked out by something. "I am on my way." Max said.

She grabbed her backpack, she hated carrying a purse so this will do and grabbed her skateboard. The snow would make it difficult but she did join a group of dweebs with an ethos she could get behind. A party member required assistance.

She was out the front door when a voice stopped her. "Where are you going?" Billy asked. He wasn't snarling like he usually did. But he was irritated from his argument with Neil. "I'm going over to Mike's. Something was wrong when he called." She said. Billy nodded and pulled his keys out. "Let's go, It's to damn cold for you to skate." He said. Max nodded and got in the Camero.

The ride was short but silent. Billy was still fuming about the fight that Max had tuned out. The pair also had a bit of a rocky relationship. It was improving over the years but it was still awkward.

"You ok Billy?" She asked. He nodded but his eyes betrayed his anger. "For what it's worth, Heather is really cool and she is good for you." She said. Billy nodded. "Well, I'm glad you and Susan think so. I am just so fucking tired of dad badmouthing her." He said. Max nodded and put a hand on his arm.

"Hey, it says a lot about you if you hate Neil saying shit about Heather." She said. Billy smiled a little. "Well, I may deck his ass if he talks about Mr. Sinclair again. Man got me a job and Neil sees fit to talk shit about him." Billy said. Max smiled at him. Billy helped Mr. Sinclair at his law office while Billy was in college. He was studying Law and Mr. Sinclair said if he kept up the good work he would write a letter of recommendation to the University of Chicago Law School.

They arrived at Mike's house and found no cars in the drive way. Both Billy and Max got out. Once they reached the door, Max knocked and Mike answered, looking more haggard than usual. He wasn't surprised to see Billy, or at least didn't care he was there.

"It's Holly, she's sick and I don't know what to do." Mike said. He also

sounded sick. "Well, let's check on her." Max said and Mike led them both upstairs. He led them past his room, which Max noticed was a little worse for wear. Once they reached the room, Max walked inside with Billy looking after Mike.

She walked in and saw the little blonde look up, she gave her a weak smile. "Hey there Ladybug." Max said, a nickname she gave Holly because of a Halloween costume she was wearing when Max first formally met her. Holly gave her a weak hello. Max knelt down next to her and felt her forehead. She was burning up.

"Is Mikey okay? He was checking on me but he kept falling over." Holly asked. Max grimaced. "Yea, Mikey is fine. Why isn't your mommy taking care of you?" Max asked. Holly shrugged her shoulders. "Mommy left with Daddy, they have been gone for a while." She said. Max looked to the door and wondered how long Mike had been watching Holly.

"Well, me and Billy are here and we will help out." She said smiling at Holly. The small girl smiled at the redhead. Max got up and left the room to find Billy holding Mike up. He really looked like shit.

"How long have you been watching her like this?" Max demanded quietly. Mike looked up, he could barely stand. "They left a week ago to visit one of Dad's college friends. Mom didn't want to leave Holly like this but Dad said I needed to man up about this." He explained. Max's eyes narrowed. "How long have you been sick?" She asked. "A few days. It didn't get bad till yesterday." He said. The translation was he was just as bad when they left but put on a brave face so his dad could go out of town.

"Okay, let's get you in bed." Billy said moving him. Mike tried to fight him off. "No, I need to be near Holly. I have to take care of her." He said. "Yea, and who is taking care of you?" Billy asked. Mike shrugged. "I'll be fine." He said. "Okay, how about we take you both downstairs?" Max asked. Mike seemed to like that and nodded.

Billy helped Mike to Ted's La-z-boy and Max carried Holly in a blanket and set her on the couch. The pair went to the kitchen with Max fuming at the situation. "God damn paladin trying to kill himself. Fucking Karen not having a goddamn spine. Asshole Ted not

seeing his damn kids are sick." She grumbled as she looked in the pantry for some soup. Billy was grabbing a pot. "You think he should have called sooner?" Billy asked. Max turned around carrying two cans of tomato soup. "I think his parents should have stayed. He is in no condition to take care of Holly. He barely takes care of himself." She said. "Is it because of ya know....El?" Billy asked.

Billy learned about El through an incident last July when Starcourt Mall caught fire. She saved many of them with her powers, and Billy saw it. He agreed to keep quiet about it and was lukewarm welcomed to the group along with Steve's coworker Robin. They knew about the government taking her in September. Max considered this. Mike was a depressed mess but she didn't think he was self destructive. The pair began making the soup, both taking turns checking on Mike and Holly.

"Where is Nancy in all of this?" Billy asked Mike. Mike looked up and shook his head. "I think she is staying with Jonathan. Her and dad have been fighting." Mike said weakly. Billy nodded and headed back to the kitchen.

"Hey, whats the number for Byers?" Billy asked. Max told him and saw him call. "Hey Mrs. Byers, can I speak with Nancy?" Billy asked. He waited a few moments before speaking again. "Your brother and sister are sick and your parents left them here." Billy said. He wasn't trying to be accusing. "Me and Max are taking care of them but I dunno how your mom expects a sick person to care for a sick person." He said. After a moment he hung up the phone. "Nancy is coming over to help out. She is properly pissed off." Billy said. Max laughed a little.

Once the soup was done, and a couple of glasses of orange juice were filled, Nancy came in through the front door, followed by Mrs. Byers. Well, Mrs. Hopper now, but old habits and such. They both entered the living room to see Billy helping Mike eat his soup while Max was feeding Holly. Nancy was slightly frantic till she saw Max and Billy were taking care of them.

"Sorry, I didn't know." She said apologetically. It wasn't a problem and soon Joyce was taking charge. She had Nancy and Max give Holly a hot bath, and Billy helped Mike into some warm clothes to

help break his fever. "I am going to kill Karen for not calling me." Joyce muttered as she checked Mike's temperature.

Joyce returned home that evening, satisfied Nancy had things in hand with Billy and Max. The group went down to the basement to sleep. Max looked over at Mike, he was still awake.

"Mike, what the hell is wrong with you?" She whispered at him. He looked at her, he was ashamed of himself. "Sorry, I just have been struggling." Mike said. She placed her hand on his.

"We all are Mike. Your not alone in this." She said. Mike looked down and felt ashamed in himself. Ge began nodding in agreement. "I'm sorry. Your right. I will do better." Mike said. Max smiled. "Good, because if you don't, I'll kick your ass." She said. Mike smiled with her. He went to sleep and hoped things would improve.

### *Present day*

Max passed into Hawkins, letting the memory fade. Ted and Karen came back a few days later and Billy gave them both a piece of his mind. The message was delivered. Nancy moved back in and Mike started asking for help more. It was a good change.

She made it to her mother's house and parked in the driveway. "Ready for a fun weekend baby?" Max asked the sleeping child.

### *Department of Energy holding facility*

Mike sat in the chair of the interrogation room. They removed the bag from his head and kept his hands cuffed behind his back. He looked around the room and saw a single camera the top corner of the room.

He looked at the mirror, knowing he was being watched. Well, he hoped they record the show he is about to give them

### *Observation*

"Your sure you can handle this on your own?" Jericho asked. Saverio rolled his eyes. "I think I can handle one dumbass nerd." He said as he left the room. Jericho wanted to point out nerds were smart,

probably smarter than he was, but he just rolled his eyes. He was joined by two guards, both watching with him as Saverio entered the Interrogation room.

"Mr. Wheeler, how's it going? Has your stay been to your liking?" He asked. Wheeler did not miss a beat.

"Oh my stay has been fine, Although I asked for the dominatrix package, not the boring interrogation. I might wanna talk to management." Wheeler said. Saverio began laughing slightly, then punched Wheeler in the head.

"You're a stupid punk. You and your dumbass friends caused us a lot of trouble." He said sitting across from him. "My name is Saverio Alacqua, I am chief of staff to Secretary Brenner." He said. Wheeler scoffed, clearly not impressed.

Jericho was impressed by how Saverio wasn't really intimidating Wheeler. Or at least he wasn't showing it. The rumors he heard about Saverio were mostly about how he had a cruel streak a mile wide. Wheeler must not know or care.

"So, you know once your gone, everyone you ever associated with you will be punished. Suzie Henderson? Her medical license is about to be revoked. And her marriage to her husband? Its about to be annulled. And as for your son? I know some really bad foster parents." Saverio said. Wheeler just kind of nodded at him.

Then Wheeler put his hands on the table, having picked his cuffs off. "Do you have to sound like a cartoon bad guy?" Wheeler asked. Saverio looked embarrassed. Jericho imagined he sounded intimidating in his head. Saverio got up and rolled up his sleeves. Wheeler flashed a smile before kicking the table and shoved Saverio against the wall.

Wheeler punched Saverio with the handcuffs, delivering a cut across his face. He grabbed his head and slammed it against the mirror. The slam surprised Jericho. He looked at the two guards. "Go help him out." He said. The pair nodded and headed to out.

They quickly entered the room and Wheeler turned to face them. He

gave the table one more kick to knock the wind out of Saverio then rushed the guards. The one on the left tried to kick him, but Wheeler grabbed his leg and swung him to the right, knocking the other guard down. Jericho looked on, studying him.

Wheeler quickly used the handcuffs on them, then made for the door. Jericho also made for his door to give this boy a piece of his mind.

### *Holding Cell*

Suzie was separated from Dustin when they were brought in. She could tell he was next to her cell but the guard they had was under orders to keep them quiet. That gave her an idea.

"Mr. Guard man, I'm bored." She whined. The guard showed up in front of her cell. "This isn't a hotel, shut the fuck up." He said. "But its boring." She kept whining. She knew this was irritating. The guard grabbed his keys and unlocked the cell while muttering about shutting her up.

Once the cell door was open, Suzie was ready and before he knew it, he was tossed on the ground inside the cell and kicked in the face hard. He was out before he knew it. "God what a moron." She said as she grabbed his keys.

She went to the next cell where her Dusty-Bum was standing by the cell with a wide grin. "That's my Suzie-Poo." He said, kissing her as she opened the cell.

### *Interrogation*

As Mike exited the room and locked it behind him, he noticed another figure leave the observation room. He was an inch taller than him, wearing a suit. He was older than Mike, but looked no less dangerous with his large muscles. It was the Bravo Company Boss.

"I gotta say Wheeler, you gave me a laugh. Saverio needed to see what his schoolyard taunts would bring him. But I need to get paid. So if you surrender here and now, I will keep them from beating your ass." He said.

Mike did not surrender, instead he got into a fighting position. The

Boss smiled and pulled off his blazer. "I was hoping you would do that." He said as he rolled up his sleeves. Mike noticed his forearms had tattoos, one was a clear d20. He hoped he could ask about that some time.

Mike was rushed by the Boss, a punch swung from his right slammed into his ribs. When Mike leaned down, his left elbow slammed into his back. "You beat two of my best men. I know you can do better than this." He said as he picked Mike up by the back of his shirt.

As he was being lifted up, Mike used his left foot to launch himself up and kick him under his chin with his right foot. The Boss stepped back a few feet, then he smiled at Mike. "Much better." He said and the two rushed each other.

The Boss sent a punch with his right, Mike ducked under him and punched him with his left, then pressed his advantage and punched his face with his right. He punched with his left, but the Boss blocked with his left and sent a punch into Mike's face with his right.

Mike staggered back and found himself being tackled. The Boss then jumped into the air and slammed him into the ground. Mike groaned as the Boss got off of him, and found himself getting kicked in his sides. Two powerful strikes hit him, but Mike grabbed his leg on the third and rolled away, putting him off balance. Mike got up and just as the Boss regained his footing, Mike shoulder tackled him. He

The Boss grabbed Mike by his collar, and Mike did the same to the Boss and the two started trading haymakers into each other. Mike felt blood coming out of his mouth and The Boss was developing bruising to his face. Mike shoved the Boss back, letting go of his shirt collar, and then Mike kicked him hard in the face and knocked him on his back.

He didn't have time for more of this and rushed over him to another door. He closed it and took out the keys he took from Saverio. He was looking for the right key when a force slammed into the door. "Come on little boy. We are not done playing." The Boss said. Mike was done and found the right key and locked the door and ran off.

*Jericho*

He slammed his fist into the metal door and let out a roar. "Yea, I am so not done with you." Jericho said as he headed to the interrogation room. He saw Saverio had a furious look on his face as he unlocked the door.

"HOW COULD YOU LET HIM GET AWAY!" He shouted. Jericho spit blood into his face. "How could you let him escape with your damn keys." Jericho said. Saverio looked shocked and saw his keys were removed.

"I admit, I also have been underestimating him. But playtime is now over." Jericho said as he took a radio from one of the handcuffed guards. "We have a prisoner escape. Lock down the facility. Find him." Jericho said into the receiver.

"Affirmative, we also have an escape from the holding cell's. The pair we brought in with Wheeler also escaped." The voice said. Jericho groaned, growing more irritated. "Get my men on this. Wheeler ran to the lab complex, send Martin and Ford there." He said. The voice rogered him and sent about his orders.

"Is there another way to the lab?" Jericho asked Saverio. He nodded and the two headed around.

### *Laboratory*

Mike ran through the lab area, taking care to avoid being seen. But he realized there was nobody there. It seemed odd there were no guards or scientists. He just spotted one lone scientist. He was an older man with crazy hair. He didn't notice Mike so he headed for the door and found it locked.

"I was hoping to have a chat with you Mr. Wheeler." The scientist said in a thick German accent. Mike turned and saw he was still facing away from him. "Who are you?" Mike asked. The scientist turned around, cool blue eyes met Mike. "My name is Doctor Hans Strauss. And I am the creator of the machine that hunts you." He said. He did not sound proud, but sad.

"Why? Why are you after me?" Mike asked. Strauss grimaced. "It is not for me to tell you. Also it would take too long and you don't have



the time. Bravo Company is after you. But maybe if you can escape, you may be able to stop this." He said handing Mike a disc. "What is this?" Mike asked. "A chance to end this." Strauss said and he pushed a button and opened the door. Coming through was Dustin and Suzie.

"Oh thank god, you got away." Dustin said as the three hugged each other. "You might want to leave." Strauss said as he pointed to the other end of the hall. Two men in BDU's arrived. One was a slimmer but muscular blonde man and the other was a large husky man with brown hair. "Shit." Dustin said. The pair walked towards them.

"You three need to surrender. No more need for violence today." The larger one said. Mike highly doubted his words. "You think I believe you?" Mike asked. "Doesn't matter, you stop now and we will bring you back peacefully" The large man said. Dustin got to Mike's left and Suzie to his right.

"No, I think we choose violence." Dustin said. The blonde nodded. "Well we tried to be nice." He said to the larger man. He nodded and ran at them. Mike and Suzie were tackled by the large man and both slammed into the door. Dustin found himself facing the blonde man alone as he deftly moved to Dustin and delivered a series of kicks into Dustin's stomach then slammed his head into a glass window. His head did not break the glass but it shook his head.

Mike and Suzie struggled under the grip of the larger man. He had them in a death grip but Suzie and Mike had one arm each free. Suzie looked to Mike and they both nodded. Mike used his free arm on one of the large man's eyes and Suzie did the same. The pressure was too much and he let them go. Both Mike and Suzie grabbed a leg and pulled away and made the large man fall. Two swift kicks to the head knocked him out.

Dustin was having slight trouble with the faster blonde man. He hadn't kept up much with his martial arts training in 5 years. This guy seemed to train everyday. He was delivering fast punches that Dustin was having trouble blocking. Soon he was joined by Mike, and then the two put the blonde on the defensive. The blonde sent a kick at Dustin but Mike caught the leg and threw him through a glass window and knocked him out.

"Well, that was wild." Strauss said. "Hurry to the garage, before they catch up and realize the building has not been locked down." He said. Mike nodded and the group ran out.

### *Garage*

They headed towards the garage but soon realized they were lost. They didn't know this place and soon they thought about grabbing a guard. Their problems became worse as four guards discovered them. Mike motioned for the others to surrender. The trio noticed something off with the guards. The two in the middle were having trouble handling their weapons, but the two at the ends looked like they knew their way around a gun.

The two guards at the end nodded at the trio, before bashing the ends of their rifles into the guards next to them. They fell down quick. Mike breathed a sigh of relief as they removed their balaclavas and revealed Lucas and Will.

"Oh thank God you guys are okay." Mike said pulling them into hugs. Will laughed. "Yea, they came into my apartment and tried to grab Chad. They seemed like a bunch of punks so he kicked their asses." Will explained. It helped Will's boyfriend was also a champion kickboxer.

"Are Max and Harrison okay?" Mike asked Lucas. He nodded. "They left before the apartment was raided. I got a page an hour ago that she made it to Hawkins." He explained. Mike relaxed. He knew Max could handle herself, but he didn't want Harrison involved. Especially with the threat that Saverio gave.

"We need to reach the garage. We need to leave before they find us again." Suzie said and the group nodded. Mike and Dustin hid the two guards in a closet and Will led them to the garage properly.

Once they entered, they found several trucks, including a few trucks that looked like they belonged to the power company. "Okay, you get the gate open, we will get a truck started." Mike said handing the keys to Lucas. He nodded and headed for the gate checkpoint, knocking out the guard at the booth.

Suzie got in the drivers seat of one of the vans while Dustin got in the passenger seat. As Mike was opening the back doors of the van, he was grabbed and thrown into a wall. He looked up and found the Boss standing over him.

"You think I didn't expect you to come here?" He said. Mike looked over and Saverio had arrived, pointing a gun at him.

"You guys fucked up." He snarled. Will had gone under the van and moved behind Saverio. He grabbed his legs and pulled him down. The distraction was enough for Mike to get up and rush the Boss. Mike grabbed his shirt and kneed him in the stomach. It winded the Boss and Mike tossed him into a wall.

Will dragged Saverio out into the drive way. Saverio sat up and Will delivered a knee to his face. He was out. He then dragged him to another van and threw him in the back.

Mike and the Boss were trading blows, trying to get an advantage over the other. Will opened a van's back seat, holding a set of keys he took from the visor. Mike saw it and shoved him to the open door. Will was on his fours as the Boss tripped over him, hitting his head on the roof and falling to the bed of the van. Will got up and the two closed the door. Will hit the lock button before the Boss could open the door.

Mike looked in and saw fury on the Boss's face. "I hope you know, I will track you down and finish this." He said. Mike smirked at him. "Good luck." Mike said. The Boss returned the smirk and saluted him again with his two fingers to his head. Mike returned the gesture.

"Cmon assholes, WE ARE LEAVING" Dustin yelled as Lucas entered the van. Will and Mike joined them and the van drove off.

They found themselves in downtown Indianapolis. The building looked like an abandoned police station. Mike pulled out the CD he was given by Strauss and handed it to Will. "You keep that safe. Drop me off at a motel. We separate. Call Hopper and tell him to come get us." Mike ordered.

"Why are you leaving?" Lucas asked. "It's me their after. You guys

ditch the van as soon as possible." Mike said. "Well, let me come with you." Lucas protested. Mike raised a hand to stop him. "No, I need to keep them focused on me. Just regroup with me. Let's keep in touch old school." Mike said grabbing a radio. Lucas nodded and took the radio from him. "You better not be doing some dumb self sacrifice shit." Lucas said.

"I need to see Harrison graduate high school. We just need to regroup in Hawkins." Mike said as he left the van at a stop sign. Lucas grimaced at him as he left. "Yea, you better stay alive." Lucas said. They didn't worry about being overheard on the radios, Mike and Dustin knew how to set up the radios to keep from being listened by other interested parties.

### *Holding Facility- Laboratory*

Saverio flipped a table in a fit of rage. He was furious as Wheeler escaped. Jericho was helping with giving Martin medical treatment. One of his eyes got slightly more gouged. He rolled his eyes at the tantrum Saverio was throwing.

"THEY JUST GOT AWAY FROM US. THIS WOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED IF YOUR MEN WERE COMPETENT!" Saverio yelled. Jericho looked at him. He got up and shoved Saverio to the wall with one arm.

"You need to accept blame for this as well. I did indeed underestimate him. But your men are untrained and unfit for combat. Now, you will stay out of my way while I handle finding Wheeler." Jericho said dropping him.

"Mr. Jericho is correct." The synthesized voice of the robot spoke. They all turned and faced it. "Mr. Alacqua, you will let Mr. Jericho run point on this operation. I will find Mr. Wheeler. Then we will have him." It said. Jericho gave Saverio a smug look before taking his men out of the room.

"Once the operation is done. Mr. Jericho will be of no further use to us." It said. Saverio looked at the door that he left through and smiled. "It will be my pleasure" Saverio said.

"Good, begin phase 2" It said.

AN: I hope you guys enjoy it. Please read and review

## 5. Chapter 5

Mike checked into a motel, registering as Ted Hopper, and began looking himself over. He pulled off his shirt and undershirt. His torso was heavily bruised, his face had several cuts and bruises as well. He felt his ribs and was confident they were not broken. Suzie would be able to check him over when they got to Hawkins.

He took a hot shower to soothe his aching wounds and began fiddling with the radio he took from the Department of Energy. He silently wondered what they needed with a holding facility that also had a company of soldiers. He would worry about that in the morning. For now, he was going to get some sleep, and dream of a simpler time.

*July 4th 1985*

Mike was sitting on the other end of the closing food court. His friends on the other end were laughing and joking while not noticing that Mike went away. They were all waiting on Steve to get off work and they were meeting Hopper and Joyce at the fair. Mike didn't want to go, he just wanted to mope at home.

Just three days earlier Mike got himself a massive dose of humble pie when a series of events led to El dumping him. He had lied to her because Hopper had been tired of Mike being at the cabin all the time. So Hopper told him to lie to El and stay away for a few days. Sadly, his lie did not hold up to Max Mayfield and it led to El angrily dumping him. His friends tried to be helpful about this, but Dustin and Will were resentful of him abandoning them all summer, so they had a blowout fight the other day. Mike had not told Nancy about the fight and she dragged him to the mall so they could all meet up and attend Kline's fair.

He looked over and saw El laughing with Max and Steve's coworker Robin. He smiled at seeing her laugh, wishing he was the one making her laugh. He looked away, ashamed of himself. Max and El confronted him about how he kept her all to himself, and he realized he had been selfish. All he wanted was to spend time with El and he didn't even consider he might have been selfish. Will had gotten mad at him for a fight they had while trying to play Dungeons and

Dragons, feeling neglected by his friend. Dustin was angry at him for abandoning the party. Lucas had agreed with both of them.

So, Mike sat alone, not wanting to bother his friends. If he could still be called friends. He treated them all like shit and he deserved their anger. Mike looked at his sister making goo goo eyes at Jonathan and felt a slight jealousy at how those two had a fight and managed to resolve it in a few days. He still hadn't been able to speak with El.

Mike got out of his chair and headed for the exit, he was going to walk home. He didn't want to ruin his friend's fun at the fair and he didn't want to make one of the driver's take him home, so he will walk. He was almost out of the food court when a hand grabbed his shoulder. Mike turned around and found Steve stopping him.

"Where ya going Mike?" He asked. He was out of his Scoops uniform and in his regular clothes. Mike shrugged. "I'm just going to head home. I don't feel like celebrating." He said. Steve nodded but didn't let him go. "Yea, I figured as much when Dustin told me about how things were going." He said. "Let's have a little chat." He said leading him back to the food court. He made sure nobody saw them and he sat Mike down with him at a table.

"So what's going on Mike?" Steve asked. Mike merely shrugged. He did not want to have a lecture by Steve Harrington of all people. "Dustin told me you have been a little asshole all summer. I agree, but I haven't had time to talk to you lately. Not that you and I ever talk." Steve said. Mike rolled his eyes, he just wanted to get away from here.

"Look, I get it. Supergirl over there dumps you and now the whole world sucks but man you can't be a dick to the people who have your back." Steve said. Mike sighed, that was part of the problem. "I was a dick to them before El dumped me. I was a dick to her by keeping her to myself. They don't need me." Mike said. Steve sat back, contemplating his words.

"Look Mike, I get it. Really I do. You were on top of the world with her and nothing was going to bring you down. And then a dose of reality hits you. Why don't you tell them your sorry and go from their?" Steve says. Mike is silent for a moment. "If they will take me

back. I should have been a better friend. But you are right, I was a fucking asshole and they all deserved better. El especially." Mike said.

"Then go over there and show them the better person I know you are." Steve says pointing at the group. Mike smiles and nods. "Thanks Steve. I know we never...." Mike says but Steve cuts him off. "Hey, don't mention it. Now go fix your problems." He says. Mike stands up and walks to the table the guys are sitting at.

Lucas looks up and sees him first. Dustin and Will turn around and watch him approach. Mike hesitates slightly but realizes he needs to get this over with. "Hey guys." Mike says. He notices Max is staring at him from her table she is sharing with El and Robin. He hopes she isn't going to start anything now.

"Whats up man?" Lucas asks. Mike breaths in, not knowing what to say but feels he needs to say something. "Guys, you were right. I was a jerk to all of you. Dustin, I shouldn't have left you when you came back into town. Will, you deserve a better friend than I have ever been to you. Lucas, thanks for trying to stick by me." He said. It was a bit fast for them but they knew what he said.

Will was the first to speak. "Look, we all get it. And I should have been a bit more understanding of how you were feeling at the time." Will said. "And while it was a dick move for you to leave to go make out with El, I shouldn't have yelled at you yesterday. We were trying to help and well things got out of hand." Dustin said. Mike nodded, glad things could improve. Lucas pulled a chair out. "Wanna sit with us?" He asked. Mike shook his head. "I got something I have to take care of." He said motioning to El.

The guys nodded. "Good luck man." Lucas said. The rest nodded their heads and Mike walked towards El's table. As he walked, he noticed Max was missing. Before he wondered where she was, said red head stopped him as he headed to the table. Her gaze was still fierce towards him. Mike would normally be offended by this but he knew she was looking out for El the way Mike wasn't.

"I was hoping to talk to you first." Max said. Mike nodded, he had something to tell her as well. "Yea, I figured." Mike said. She merely nodded. "Look, you kinda got put through the ringer these past few



days and I'm not really sorry about that. You needed this. El doesn't need to be controlled. But I do get a bit of where you were coming from. Just, if you do that again, I'll just kick your ass." Max said.

"Thanks Max, for being a good friend to her. She deserves it." Mike said. Max did not expect that, she half expected a fight. "Well, she deserves a good guy also. Why don't you show me that you are one." She said.

"I'll work on it. I know we aren't good friends, but I am glad you had her back." Mike said. She nodded and both walked to El's table.

"Hey Robin, you think you can show me that place where you found that jacket?" Max asked. Robin nodded and as she and El got up, Max stopped her. "I think you two need to talk." Max said. She nodded and sat back down.

Mike sat down next to her, she was looking away from him. His heart hurt. Just a few days ago she couldn't help but look at him. She was beautiful though, wearing a yellow and black checkered shirt and her hair was done up nicely.

"Hey." He said, still nervous. "Hey" She responded, barely any emotion behind it. He almost leaves, but he needs to try.

"Having fun with Max?" He asks, trying to sound good natured. "Yes, she doesn't lie." She says. Mike winces. "Yea, she doesn't lie, unlike your dumbass ex." Mike says. She finally looks at him, her eyes are not angry but rather indifferent. He doesn't know which is worse.

"El, your right. I was selfish, keeping you to myself and just being a jerk to you. I was jealous of you and Max being friends and I said all that stupid stuff. I shouldn't have lied to you either. I told you 'friends don't lie' and I break my own damn rule." Mike says. "I'm sorry El, you deserve a lot better." Mike says.

"I guess they say it's true that it makes you go crazy." Mike says. El looks at him questioningly. "What makes you go crazy?" She asks. Mike is now thrown through a loop. "Um....you know...blank makes you crazy?" He asks. She shakes her head. "It's just um..." Mike begins but something interrupts him.

A loud bang rips through the mall, It comes from one of the shops, and soon, fire is spreading. A moment later, more explosions are ripping through the mall. Fire quickly begins to spread. A large piece of debris falls from the ceiling and Mike pushes El away as it almost lands on them.

"She, what the hell?" Dustin yells. Mike looks around, He saw Robin and Max rushing back to the food court, dodging debris as the mall began shaking from the explosions. "We need to get out of here." Mike said as he helped El up. She nodded just as an explosion came from Scoops Ahoy. They were next to it, and El used her powers to hold the blast back. Robin did a double take.

"Yea, she has superpowers, but we need to leave." Steve said as he grabbed her hand headed to the other kids. Nancy and Jonathan were pulling Lucas and Max away while Will, Dustin and Erica went with Steve and Robin. "Mike, El, come on!" Nancy yelled.

"Go, I'll hold this back." She said, straining with her powers. "Are you sure?" He asked. She looked at him and gave him a quick smile. "I need you to trust me. I'll be right behind you." She said. Mike nodded and joined the others. The explosions were everywhere, Mike rushed over and Nancy pulled him into her arms.

They made it to the entrance just as it collapsed. Mike looked around and saw Billy driving up, Heather getting out of the passenger seat and they both headed to Max. For once concern was all over his face. "What the fuck is going on?" He asked. Nobody answered as more of the mall exploded. "Wait, Where's El?" Mike asked.

"I thought she was following you?" Nancy asked. Mike got away from her embrace and headed for an employee exit he and the others used when Steve would sneak them to the movies. Max followed him. "You might need a hand." She said. Mike nodded. They were having trouble with the door. "Fuck, it's stuck." Mike yelled.

"Let me help." Billy said and he kicked the door open. Mike thanks him and rushes in, Max and Billy behind him. They rush to the food court and see El holding back multiple explosions, most of the food court shops were on fire. Billy was flabbergasted by the sight. "I'll explain later." Max said. He merely nodded.

"EL, COME ON, GET OUT OF THERE!" Mike yelled. She looked over, blood pouring out of her face. "Get out of here Mike." She said back to him. "I can hold it back."

"EL, YOU'RE THE LAST ONE LEFT, COME HERE PLEASE!" Mike yelled. She turned her attention back to her task. "GODDAMNIT EL I LOVE YOU AND I CAN'T LOSE YOU AGAIN!" He shouted. She turned back to him, shocked, so shocked a piece of the explosion got loose and sent El flying. The rest of the explosions came loose as well and a piece of the ceiling fell on her leg.

Her scream broke Mike's heart and he rushed towards her, ignoring Billy and Max trying to stop him. He ignored them and the heat that should overwhelm him. He got down on the ground and crawled to her, keeping below the smoke.

"El, are you okay?" He asked once he reached her. She shook her head, in obvious pain. She pointed at the debris on her leg. It may have broken her ankle. Mike began lifting it off but he couldn't, not with the smoke and how obviously heavy it was. He fell down and grabbed her hand. "I'll get you out okay?" He told her. She nodded. Billy and Max showed up, both seeing the problem.

"Wheeler, you help me here okay? It's too much for one person." Billy said. Mike nodded and they both lifted the piece up while Max pulled El away. Billy checked her ankle. "Yea, it's broken. Let's get her out of here." He said. Mike nodded and he and Max helped her up and the pair rushed towards the door that led to the employee area. The smoke was getting bad, but they believed they could make it out.

The smoke was getting thick and they were all coughing. Soon, they fell to the ground as the smoke got to them. Mike held onto El as he felt himself lose conscience. He looked up and saw a man in a Hawaiian shirt wearing an oxygen mask.

Mike wakes up in the back of an ambulance, wearing a mask that was giving him oxygen. Mike tried to sit up and was stopped by Hopper. A look of concern was on his face. "Easy there Mike. You weren't out that long kid." He said. Mike laid down, feeling short of breath. "What the hell were you thinking?" Hopper asked. He looked down at him disapprovingly. "I couldn't leave El behind." Mike said.

"Yea, she told me. Listen Mike, you and I will talk later, I have a huge mess to clean up, but I think we could have handled things a lot better between us, you agree?" Hopper said. Mike nodded, trying to speak but Hopper put a hand up. "You rest, besides, someone wants to see you." Hopper said as he exited the ambulance.

Mike set up as Hopper helped El walk inside. She sat next to Mike, putting her head on his shoulder. Hopper left, rolling his eyes. They both sat their for a long moment, El taking Mike's hand in hers. "Did you mean it?" She asked simply. Mike took a moment before he answered. "Every word." He said. El smiled and leaned further into him. They just sat their for a long moment. Soon enough, Nancy showed up and pulled both into a massive hug. "God damnit, you both could have fucking died!" She all but shouted. Mike smiled at her as she kept admonishing them both.

Once Nancy left again, Mike looked down and saw El smiling up at him. He leaned forward and kissed her, glad that things were all right with them.

### *Present day*

Mike woke up in the early morning. He was crying, remembering how he truly won her over. He missed her more than he let on to his friends. Despite Max's best efforts, he still had a massive hole in his heart. He felt deep down she was gone, and it hurt him to no end he could never save her.

The aftermath of the fire was massive. Bruce Lowe, a reporter for the Hawkin's Post, was found by what is regarded as the first explosion point. It turned out he was working for Mayor Kline, who had bankrupted the city in building the mall. Bruce accidentally set off one of the bombs and got himself killed. Kline decided to set the rest off and killed several people still in the mall.

Kline went to prison for the arson and the murders of a few people who were unlucky to escape. Mike heard from Hopper that he killed himself in prison. This was after Hopper had visited him.

Mike used the motel room's coffee pot and made himself a cup. Mike looked out the window and saw a familiar van sitting in the parking

lot. He also saw a few members of Bravo Company walking around.

"Shit, they found me." Mike said.

### *Across town*

Will woke up before Chad, he then made a call to Hawkins. The phone rang for a moment before the gruff voice of Hopper came on. "Hello?" He asked.

"Chief, we need help." Will asked. He could hear Hopper rolling his eyes.

"I'm not the damn Chief kid. What do you need?" He said. Will quickly explained the situation. "Are you god damn serious?" Hopper growled. "I am not in a habit of joking before your morning coffee." Will said. Hopper grumbled. "All right kid, what do you need?" He asked. "Mike is drawing them away, we need you to save his dumbass." Will said.

"What else is new?" Hopper asked, already aware of Mike's antics getting him in trouble. "Okay, I'm getting Harrington and we will be there in a few hours." Hopper said. "Okay, awesome. We will meet you in a few hours." Will said. Hopper grumbled and hung up the phone.

### *Motel*

Jericho stared at the clerk at the motel check in. He was losing his patience. Somehow the machine located Wheeler and now he was losing time before the kid found out they were there and he vanished.

"I just want to know if this man checked in." Jericho asked through grit teeth. The clerk stood his ground. "Unless you have a warrant I can't tell you anything." He said. Jericho was losing his composure. He pulled out his revolver and pointed it at him. "Here is my fucking warrant. Now, did he check in!" He yelled.

The kid nodded. "Last night, room 145." He said quickly. Jericho smiled. "Thank you for your cooperation." He said as he put the gun back in his back holster. He rallied two of his men, Ford and Lopez, and made his way to room 145.

He kicked the door open and they charged inside. They found nothing, except an open window in the back. It led out to a neighborhood that was densely populated. Jericho checked the coffee pot. It was still warm. "He isn't far. We hunt." Jericho said as he left the room.

He moved out and saw a school that was not open, since it was Saturday and also a cemetery, holding a funeral. Jericho had a good idea of where he went.

### *Southside Cemetery*

Mike blended in with the funeral. He was still dressed like he was going to work, which was a dress shirt and black slacks. So it was slightly dirty from yesterday. He hid away from the mourners and contacted the others on the radio.

"Hey guys, I'm hiding at Southside Cemetery. They found me at the motel I was at. Any word on backup?" Mike asked. A few moments later he got a response.

"Yea, should take him roughly an hour to get here. Hold tight." Lucas said. "Okay, roger that." Mike said.

He hid away from the funeral, but just enough to think he was part of the crowd. He stood under a tree as the pastor was talking about the sudden death of Craig Parchman. He was 73 and had a heart attack was what Mike was able to gather.

He waited twenty minutes before he noticed someone moving on the roof of the funeral home. He was about to make a move to leave but a man grabbed his shoulder and greeted him. "How's it going Wheeler?" The man said. It was the Bravo Company Boss again. His face was still bruised and he was wearing sunglasses to hide his black eye. But for once he also had a wide smile on his face.

Mike made a move to put a hold on him but a .45 silenced pistol was pointed at him. "Not so fast. I may have orders to not kill you. But I'll plug you in the belly if you try anything." He said. "And just to keep you from doing anything stupid. My sniper up their has the widow in his sights." He said pointing at the roof of the funeral home.

"We will wait for the funeral to end, then you get to play with that machine again. As fun as this has been, I need to get paid." He said to Mike. Mike breathed in before leaning into the tree. The Boss stood next to him, putting his gun away.

"So, who the hell are you?" Mike asked. The Boss smiled at him. "My name is Charles Jericho. Most people call me Jericho." He said. Mike nodded at him. They stood together in silence.

"I noticed your d20 tattoo." Mike said. "Never figured you for a nerd." Jericho merely shrugged. "Yea, got into D&D back in the seventies. Kept it up even in military service. Played as a paladin." He explained. Mike almost rolled his eyes.

"Yea, that's my class also." Mike said. Jericho snorted. "I hope you don't think our similarities will save you." He said. It was Mike's turn to snort. "No, just trying to pass the time." Mike said. "Why, you think your going somewhere?" Jericho asked.

"You never know." Mike said. "Hrm... Well, if its any comfort. If it weren't for the fact you are marked for death, I would be trying to recruit you." Jericho said. Mike wasn't surprised, he had been approached several times by recruiters. "Well, I'd probably refuse. I have a son to look out for." Mike said. Jericho nodded. "Well, not all of us are childless. But I do see your point." He said. The funeral was dispersing and Jericho saw one of Saverio's black vans arrive.

"Well, guess this is it." Mike said. Jericho merely nodded and pulled out his revolver in his back holster. He then handed it to Mike. "One paladin to another. I won't interfere in this. My job is done." He said. Mike took the weapon and Jericho handed him a couple of speed loaders. "Good luck." He said as he walked away to join his men.

Mike looked around, lots of small tombstones, a few mausoleums in the side. Then they're was the funeral home. He saw a figure enter the cemetery. All black, even a black trench coat, it's fists were armored, along with it's knees and wearing black combat boots.

It was moving slowly, almost like it was anticipating the fight. Mike put Jericho's gun in his back belt. It walked up to Mike. "Good morning Mr. Wheeler." It said. Mike felt familiar with the synthesized

voice. "Well, let's get this over with." Mike said. "Yes, I have another appointment to deal with." It said.

Mike did not expect how fast it was. It grabbed Mike's head and delivered a powerful headbutt. Mike was dazed as it delivered a powerful kick and knocked him back. Mike tried to run away but he was grabbed by the back of his head and slammed him to the ground

The machine walked around him, he could hear a faint laughter coming from it. "Mr. Jericho and his men had trouble with you. I gained upgrades to adapt to you. It seems they were not needed." It said. Mike groaned and got up. It delivered a punch and Mike deflected it to his right, then punched by its other fist. Mike staggered back. It delivered another punch and Mike barely blocked it.

The machine sent a powerful roundhouse kick, and Mike ducked it and tried to trip it. Once his leg connected, it didn't move. Mike rolled out of the way before the outstretched leg came down on him. They found themselves close to the funeral home, The machine grabbed Mike and threw him through the window.

Mike barely got up from the floor when he was suddenly flung out the door as the machine marched towards him, Mike broke out into a run, heading towards the mausoleums. As he hid by one, he began catching his breath. He saw a shovel nearby and grabbed it. He waited for the machine to arrive, but when he looked to see if it was following him, he saw it was gone.

When he turned around it was there, right beside him. Mike jumped back and hit the machine in it's head. The shovel broke and it didn't faze the machine. It delivered a powerful kick to Mike and he fell to the ground.

Mike was crawling away as he heard the machine laugh. "I am so disappointed in you Mr. Wheeler. I thought you would have more fight in you." It said. It's voice wasn't synthesized anymore, and it sounded very human. "Dr. Brenner?" Mike asked. The cold laugh came through. "Yes, how do you like the upgrade?" He asked.

"You're a little shorter than normal." Mike said as he got up. Brenner laughed even more. "This is just the beginning, wait till you see what



else I can do." Brenner said. "I am the future." And then, objects began to float.

### *Jericho*

He was watching the fight, well more like a beating, from the edge of the cemetery. When Mike ran towards the mausoleums, he asked his sniper to confirm what was going on. "Weatherford, what do you see?" He asked. A moment later a voice came from the radio. "Boss, shit's floating." He said. Jericho asked for a repeat. "Boss, I say again, shit's floating."

### *Mike*

It had been a long time since Mike saw anything float, it was 1986 to be exact. And here it was, Dr. Brenner was making things float. An 86 year old man somehow in fighting shape and much shorter than he usually was, he was making things float. Mike was internally freaking out. Soon, parts of stone were being fired at him. Mike barely had time to scramble away.

He got back to the main cemetery area and soon, headstones were being lifted up. Violently they were being slammed at him. Mike barely was able to avoid them. He was scrambling to escape as Brenner began chasing him, slamming headstones near him. Mike made it to one of the walls surrounding the cemetery, a short four foot wall. He was almost at the wall, certain Brenner would catch him. As he reached the wall, a large man in a grey beard jumped from the other side, pointing a shotgun. Mike ducked down and the man fired. Brenner took a full blast and went backwards, rolling down the hill.

"Hopper? You got here fast." Mike said as Hopper grabbed his hand and helped him up. Soon, automatic fire is directed at them. "We'll talk later. Let's get out of here." Hopper said. They ran away to the street. As they were running, they both heard a voice calling out to them. "Mike? Dad? Please help." It sounded familiar to Mike, who stopped to see Brenner still on the ground. "Come on Wheeler, we are leaving!" Hopper shouted.

They ran and headed to a waiting van, the side door opened up to

reveal Robin Buckley returning fire to the mercenaries. Both Mike and Hopper dived inside and quickly the door closed. Mike looked and saw Steve at the drivers seat. "Cmon Harrington, floor it." Hopper yelled. They all fell over as they Steve hit the gas and drove off.

### *Jericho*

They were rushing to where Wheeler had escaped with the ancient looking lumberjack. Jericho saw them escape in a white van. As they neared the escaping van, Jericho saw the machine breathing. He thought it was a robot or something. But he saw it was in obvious distress. He kneeled down next to it and tried to remove the helmet. It was stuck but Jericho noticed a kind of visor on the helmet. His men stopped to see what he was doing.

Jericho pulled out a pocket knife and found the edge of the visor. "Relax, I'm getting this off of you." He said. The machine placed a hand on his arm. It seemed to be looking for comfort. Jericho placed the blade in the edge of the visor and with a little effort, he was able to put his fingers inside and pull the visor off.

Inside was a face. It was a girl, with bright brown doe eyes. She reached out to him. "Please, help me." She said, tears brimming on her face. Jericho reached his hand out to her when pain wracked her body. He saw that around her neck was a shock collar as it lit up. Jericho looked up and saw Saverio approaching them, with armed guards. They quickly surrounded them, and for once Jericho believed they were well trained. "Put your weapons down NOW!" Saverio shouted. He nodded to his men as he put his hands up. They were surrounded and outnumbered. He took one last look at the girl in the suit before they were dragged away. "What the hell is going on." He said

### *Mike*

Robin was helping patch up his wounds. "It's been a while since we had you like this Wheeler." She said s she cleaned the blood from his face. They met up with the others in a parking garage, Suzie was on her laptop looking at the disc that Mike gave her yesterday. She looked through the files, shock overtaking her face.

"Mike, guys, you need to look at this." She said as she showed them the screen. Mike looked up. "What the hell?"

## **END OF ACT 1**

**AN:** End of act 1. I know i left you guys with a cliffhanger and it might be a while before i update this. Hardware is going on hiatus for two reasons. the first being i need to figure out the next couple of acts, the second is because i am getting burned out on writing. 'Whats wrong' might also be sparsely updated because i got half of one page done and i am just not feeling it like i usually do. I love both of these stories, don't get me wrong but i need to recharge and find some more inspiration. I am not leaving like i originally planned a few months ago, I will still be reading and commenting, but i want to make sure i deliver good quality writing and not just rushing things out. I do hope you guys read and review and enjoy.